

Froebel, Friedrich Wilhelm August



Kindergarten

Talks and Tales

... BY ...

Elizabeth Harrison

Story of Friedrich Froebel

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STORY
OF
FRIEDRICH FROEBEL.

BY
ELIZABETH HARRISON.
AUTHOR OF "A STUDY OF CHILD NATURE," "A VISION
OF DANTE," ETC., ETC.

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Friedrich Froebel.

A LONG time ago, yes, even more than a hundred years ago, there lived over in Germany, a little boy whose mamma had died and gone to heaven, and whose papa was a clergyman. But he was so very busy that he had little or no time for this child.

The older brothers and sisters had been sent away to school, therefore this little boy, whose name was Friedrich, lived a very lonely life. He often wandered about the house, having nothing else to do. If he asked his father any questions he was too busy to answer them; and the servants about the place, were all so much occupied with their work that they had no spare time for Master Friedrich; even the new mamma, who came

after awhile, was soon so much occupied with her own little baby that she could not give any time to Friedrich. He had few playthings, and did not know how to play with those he had, so he would sometimes stand for an hour at a time and watch the stone masons, who were busy at work across the street, building a new church. They seemed such a happy set of workers that Friedrich often wished that he might go over and help them—but of course he was only a little boy, and what could a little boy do to help men at their work?

After a time Friedrich's big brother, Joseph, came home from school for his vacation, and Friedrich told him how very lonely he was and how he wished for something to do. This good brother took the little fellow out into the garden and showed him how he could care for the plants and shrubs growing there; how he could water and dig around them and thus help them to grow.

He also showed him the papa and mamma and the little baby flowers, and how most of these flower families lived in beautiful homes which men call blossoms.

Friedrich, you may be sure, was delighted to know all this; and also to feel that he could be of use to the plants in his father's garden.

From this time forth he spent many happy hours in the fresh air and sunshine, working in the garden, and watching the beautiful flowers unfold.

Year after year Friedrich grew taller and stronger until he was old enough to be sent away to school, when a dear old uncle, who was very kind to him, took him to his home. There he lived a number of happy years, studying hard and learning much which was helpful to him in after life.

By and by he grew to be a man, and people no longer called him "Friedrich," but "Mr. Froebel." All these years he had

been watching the little children about him, and thinking and thinking, until at last he made a *great discovery*.

What do you think it was? I will tell you!

The way to make little children happy!

He had noticed that a certain kind of children were always happy, no matter how poor they were, or how hard they had to work. And certain other children were always unhappy, no matter how rich they were, or how many people there were who were trying to please them. Was it not a grand discovery of his? Think of it; *how to make all little children happy!*

I wonder how many of you would like to know the secret? Well, this is it. He found that little children who loved to be busy working for some one, or something besides themselves, were always happy, and that little children who had nothing to do, and no one to work for except them-

selves, were always unhappy. So said the good Friedrich Froebel: "I will see what I can do to help keep little children busy." He remembered how he used to wish he could help the stone masons at their work; therefore he made little square and oblong blocks for children to use in building houses and churches and other things; then he planned work with sticks and tablets and all that we now have in our kindergartens. He was a long time doing all this, for he had to think it all out by himself, as not one person at that time had ever thought of such things for little children.

While he was planning and working for the children of his nation, a great war broke out, and the king of the country called for all the bravest of the men to come and help him drive the enemy out of the land. Friedrich Froebel at once stopped all other work, and joined the king's army. Many a long and weary march he had, and many a night

was he obliged to sleep on the hard ground, with only his army blanket over him.

But the stars looked down brightly upon him and in his heart was the happy thought: "I am helping to save the country of the little children whom I am some day going to teach."

So after all it was not hard for him; then too, while he was in the army he met another noble-hearted man named Middendorf, and as the two sat together by their camp fire, or lay side by side on the ground at night, Friedrich Froebel would talk to Middendorf about his plans for little children, until Middendorf exclaimed: "Let me come, too, and help you."

After the war was over, these two, dear, good men worked many years together, never thinking of having a gay or even an easy time; but only of how they could make the right kind of a school in which to train

little boys and girls to become happy and useful, noble and unselfish.

This new kind of school Froebel called a *Kindergarten*—“for,” said he, “it must be a place where little children’s hearts shall grow as lovely and beautiful as are the most beautiful flowers in any garden.”

The word, *Kindergarten*, means child-garden, or “where little children grow.”

After Friedrich Froebel had taught this *Kindergarten* until he knew just how to do it in the right way, he thought to himself, *All* the children everywhere ought to have just such training, and he called to him some noble, true-hearted women and said. “I will teach you how to have *Kindergartens*, so that you may go out over all the world, and start them wherever there are little children and thus show them how to be happy in loving and serving others.” “Oh dear, but it will take such a long time,” was the reply, to which dear Froebel smiled gently and said:

“Yes, if in three hundred years after my death my method of education be established, I shall rejoice in heaven.”

So you see, dear children, he was patient as well as loving and unselfish, and now you know to whom we owe our Kindergartens. All little children who knew him loved him, and I think the children of all time ought to go on loving him. We can celebrate his birthday, and show how glad we are that God let him come into the world, and sent to us, through him, such loving thoughts for little children.

But this was not all he did, for he so loved the whole world, that after he became an old man he wrote a book full of rich, holy thoughts for mothers, called “The Mothers’ Play and Nursery Song.” In it there are songs and pictures and music for mothers to use with their little ones. No one has ever studied this book rightly that it has not made them love children more.

So you see, we grown people have something for which to be grateful to the dear Froebel.

By and by when you grow to be men and women, you can show how much you love him and thank him, by making more Kindergartens for little children; for the very best thing you can do for a little child is to put him into a Kindergarten where he will grow loving and thoughtful of others, industrious and willing to help every one and grateful and obedient to the dear Heavenly Father.

Just think how happy it will make you when you meet this good Froebel in heaven and you can tell him that you, too, tried to help little children to be noble and loving and happy.

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